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Hefty comprehensive guide to postwar American men's adventure magazines; includes descriptions of history, culture and artistry of the magazines of the 1950s-1970s.

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From Reader Review Men's Adventure Magazines for online ebook

Francisco Becerra says

Animals, Nazis, Commies, Bikers, all torturing women in every despicable way imagined, while bombastic titles promised true stories of sex, lost bounties, the armies of the Dalai Lama's hookers, or the Hitler's pleasure dungeons, or the cannibal islands... This is a collection of incredible illustrations made for the most obnoxious and misogynic readings ever. But their stories are explained in a very thoughtful way, and let us know about the fragile spirit if the returned soldiers, the double moral standards in the US through half century, and how sexuality lived on the razor's edge.

Make no mistake: the illustrations are beautiful in their own twisted way, and tell us the most unbelievable tales. A wonder to look at!

Joe Blow says

Calling all men, drop that Coors Light sissy beer, get in your car, drive to your local book store and buy this. Your wife or girlfriend will thank you for discovering what being a man is all about. Shooting Natives, Creaming Nazi's, Stomping Commies, and Punching Hippies you could not ask for more. I love this book, yes it is mainly pictures, but the artwork is truly amazing!!

Sarah Crawford says

The chapter titles include Blood,Sweat and tits; Weasels Ripped My Flesh, the Wild rampage of the Sex-crazed Pirate Women, I Watched the Fire Dance of Human Sacrifice, We Shot Our Way Out, and Soft Flesh for the Reds' House of 1,000 Agonies. There are loads and loads of color reproductions of various magazine covers. The majority of the book is taken up by these covers, which is good.

The print size used in the book, though, is very small and, unless your eyesight is perfect, you're going to need a magnifying glass. Also, chapter text is done in English, French and German, although the cover illustrations used in the sections do differ.

Bill Palmer says

This is the kind of book you never stop reading because it's full of those 50s style mens magazine covers and every picture is worth at least a 1000 words. These covers are works of art so you find yourself just flipping through at random times. And if your a writer this book is inspiring and full of story ideas. The cover of Exotic Adventure depicting the "Wolf-Women of India" really got me thinking.

Charles says

This is a fascinating collection of pulpish covers from the Men's Adventure magazines. Great fun if you don't

mind the rampant sexism. There is some essay material as well but it's pretty slender and I would have liked a lot more of that. But the covers are worth the price of admission. Definitely some extremely humorous examples of the pulp cover art.

Philip Athans says

Reveals a lost world of strange machismo.

Teo says

Believe it or not, once there was a time when men were still real men, and men's magazines were real men's magazines. Taschen Books presents us the world of men's adventure magazines in post-war America, a recounting of a manly history not so far ago, but nearly forgotten by today's generations.

The men's adventure magazines, known simply as sweats, were an offspring of earlier and very popular pulp magazines. With names like Rage, Fury, Real Men, Rugged Men and Untamed, they offered their readers fictitious, or mostly fictitious, "true" stories of adventurers, soldiers, prisoners of war or ordinary men caught in extraordinary situations where more often than not their life hung by a thread; and not only theirs, but also the life of a beautiful maiden in dire need of rescuing either from wild beasts like weasels, lions or panthers, or the crazed members of whatever enemy army was America currently at war with.

The book in itself is not actually that much for reading, but watching instead. On its 500+ pages, one can find, printed on slick, high-quality paper in full color, more than 1000 outrageous, but exquisite sweats' covers from all periods, along with a brief history of the magazines in general. The book is divided into 7 chapters, detailing the seven eras of sweats, along with an introductory essay and a extra chapter introducing artists, authors and publishers along with a bonus interview with Norm Eastman, who is possibly the best known cover artist of the men's adventure magazines. Also, the book is trilingual, featuring texts in English, German and French.

Now, I unfortunately haven't read it, but I've heard that Feral House's It's a Man's World – a book on the same topic published a year earlier – is a superior book in terms of information about and history of the sweats, giving you more insight about what was going on at that time. Whatever the case, the texts by Max Allan Collins and George Hagenauer are informative enough and filled with humor, especially the introductory "Blood, Sweat and Tits" essay by Steven Heller, which had me laughing quite a few times.

The stars of these book, however, are not words, but pictures – and it has got enough of them to make your brain explode. Inside you'll find numerous artworks, mostly covers, but also interior art. Every artwork is properly tagged with the name of the publication and the date of publishing, and if available the artist's name. I suggest you take your time with it: don't rush, read the texts first, and study each cover in detail (meaning, read the story titles featured inside and such). That way, your enjoyment will be maximized.

All in all, this is a truly wonderful collection; a way for us who weren't there to experience all the beauty (and blood and sweat and tits) and manliness of the men's adventure magazines. A must have!

Rating: 10/10

David says

Brief historical essays introduce scores upon scores of sexist, racist, outrageous, hilarious painted illustrations from the "sweat" magazines of the (mainly) 1950s and 1960s. You will like this book exactly as much as you think you will.

Dan Schwent says

Let's get down to business. This is largely a collection of pulp covers with art depicting attractive women in distress (and torn clothing!) It's a bit of naughty good fun and there are some really good Rafael Desoto pieces in it, as well as some that are laughable. One memorable cover featured a man and a women getting attacked by snapping turtles!

I found this gem on the bargain table at Barnes and Noble while my girlfriend and I were waiting for a table to open up at the California Pizza Kitchen next door. It's been a worthwhile purchase. The cover said "Raped in a black wave of terror!" I'd have been a fool not to buy it and so would you.

Han Nguyen says

A nice visual encyclopedia, however if you picked it up expecting great insight into the world of creating these covers and what type of world they represent, this is not the book for you.

A better option would be "It's a Man's World" published by Feral House, which is slightly more expensive but includes essays and interviews from writers and illustrators as well as having a bigger format which makes for better quality images.

Tim Pendry says

Well, what can one say! This is a typical Taschen collection of the culturally marginal. "Men's Adventure Magazines" is a book of covers from the Rich Oberg Collection. These magazines were an American publishing phenomenon that lasted from the interwar period through to their eventual demise in the late 1960s. The startling but often very repetitive art work provides some interesting source material for twentieth century cultural history.

But here is a question that arises from the book - what happens in a free market society when unsatisfied psychological needs demand fulfilment within a very conventional culture? One answer is that entrepreneurs create fantasies that can be both acceptable to the buyer (who wants the thrill) and to society (which needs reassurance that the thrill will not prove destructive). These magazines tell us a great deal about what many working class American males felt they could be seen to want amongst their peers - and what was not acceptable.

The artwork is one thing but the short but excellent guideline articles by the Editors provide the meat of the book. We are not dealing with some eternal essence of man fascinated by tales of bondage and rape, submission to exotic females and that hoary (excuse the pun) old classic, the madonna-harlot division of all womankind. Something very specific in time and place is going as an unstable industrialised society faced

depression and war and sought to find a way to keep the popular imagination fixed on ideals that would keep that society. Cohesion was far more important than resolving personal inner conflicts.

The covers cannot be described easily, they have to be experienced. The rather dark vision of the male mind that they offer can be profitably reviewed alongside Gillian Freeman's book on underground sexual literature at the tail end of the period (the 1960s)- see <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/30...> . some of the comments on the aggression in that literature apply to this review - and vice versa. We are talking about minds wired in a certain way.

What was going on here? Why did these magazines appear at this time and in this way? Apart, that is, from the fact that a free market society created new opportunities for swift-on-the-feet entrepreneurs with cheap resourcing of text and of image and efficient distribution systems. The economics of these particular pulps are easy to understand but the question nags whether the need they met was 'normal' or merely normal for a very disturbed culture in transition to the world we know now.

There are three critical events in the story of the American working male as a sexual being at this time - the Catholic-led reaction to free imaginative expression as depression bit deep into the economy, the actual experience of war, and the effect, as the cause of the demise of the magazines, of the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

The first event transformed any expression of sexuality into a threat to be managed - the result was a toxic amalgam of suspicion and sadism as a substitute for openness. The Catholic Church, and that sort of 'expert' in psychology who has caused so much damage to so many people, conspired to, in a phrase, damn fantasy to hell. It is hard to believe that a culture of comic book fantasy that is now global through films and television was regarded as a primary threat to moral order, especially to children. The imagination of tens of thousands of teenagers and young males was treated as a problem rather than as a creative opportunity. A world of peasant priests and repressed intellectuals tried to keep the passions of the people bound within norms of their partial making - a vile crime was done to culture and imagination and is still being done today by similar theocracies of the mind.

Many men were not merely constrained in their sexual imagination, so that 'normal' thoughts became abnormal, wicked, even evil, but were unable to negotiate with women as sexual beings directly. Gender relations became strained through conventions that were ultimately dictated, in an apparently secular society, by faith-based groups and moralists, of which the Catholic hierarchy and the psychological community were merely a part. The failed drive against alcohol and the successful drives against drugs and gambling represented a disturbed streak in American life that extended, as 'American values', across the world - romantic love, Ayn Rand self-discipline, rugged individualism, competition ...

The second event, following the misery for the American working class of the seemingly never-ending economic depression, was war - in some ways, a blessed relief to many young males. Not just one great and noble war occasioned by Pearl Harbour but a succession of wars that culminated in the debacle in Vietnam. Comradeship, purpose, fear as a profound experience - for a few, this was the high point of their existence.

But now, working men were constrained from talking about their actual experience of war in both its sexual and violent aspects when they came home. You did not bring home the 'truth' of quick refugee sex or of officially sanctioned whore-houses or your bonded mates brains being blown out over your own face or the experience of killing a kid no older than yourself. The homestead was to be protected from the reality of injun-killing. Death was supposed to be a ritual with a meaning - the meaninglessness of combat was not for wives and children. And so protection from reality became protection from the truth and this logically meant the construction of noble lies - so that noble lies became the necessary lingua franca of politics and of commerce. The right to lie in order to protect or sell is sacrosanct in this culture.

A conventional society, protective of its lies and its values, forced many men, not only fighters but those trapped into early marriage and working on the shop floor, into an internal world of desperate rage and inner violence. Did this translate into actual secret violence against women and the abuse of sex workers? Undoubtedly. This was not going to be about sex but impotence.

The covers in this book tell the story with depressing regularity of form and function. For something like thirty years, entrepreneurs, limited on one side by strange norms of decency that still haunt America today (the fear of the nipple alongside the love of blood and sado-masochistic submission) and on the other by the market censorship of the military bases, created the fantasies that served this sad component of a sick society. What made America was treated like the manufacture of sausages - you did not want to see how it was done lest you cease enjoying the meal.

The covers showed what these often very brave and frightened men feared in symbolic form - constant animal attacks, evil overseas enemies, savage tribespeople, castrating strong women - and what they wanted in their hearts - to kill and survive in direct bloody combat, often with beautiful whore-women fighting alongside them against unimaginable evils (whether Nazi or Red merely depended on the year). The texts were filled with sexual anxiety, especially of what their 'pure' women back home might be getting up to and how deviants in society conducted themselves (prostitutes, satanists, college kids) - with an element of envy no doubt.

The sexuality was always one of struggle - the men are more often victims than victors, expressing their hormone-drenched manhood in saving sexually potent women from sadists, whose sadism, of course, is observed in loving detail. These magazines sold and in their hundreds of thousands so they do have a meaning and it cries out at you - these men wanted sexual liberation as heroes with women alongside who understood them.

What killed these magazines off was the arrival of a sexuality of a different sort. Paradoxically, the culture was gentler but, in taking off the edge of fear, perhaps even less respectful of women. The culture of Penthouse and Playboy treated women like objects of desire but the action man aspect was no longer necessary. The ending of the draft, growing middle class doubts about the virtues of war and the more overt forms of imperialism, and the slide into the economic gloom of the 1970s bifurcated the market into college-educated and the rest. The loss of mass military markets and the opportunity to see more flesh and read more openly about sexuality (albeit from a rather limited perspective) pulled the volume business out from under a phenomenon that depended on mass repression and rage in about equal proportions. Hustler added the crude element to bridge the gap - famously in its vicious meat-grinder cover.

This was the third set of events - the assertion of liberal freedom in court cases in the UK and US that allowed a new breed of entrepreneurs to open an already socially liberal door in London and then displace the older breed of pulps with better photography and material. The book makes clear that, through Penthouse (now very tame), the British introduced their alien liberalism - a hall mark of the core English character - around 1970. The competitive pressure helped drive the pulps out.

The last thirty years might be termed an era in which we have seen a steady, slow calming of the Western male psyche. Faith-based repression and the experience of war has diminished except in traditional communities or the lumpen parts of the working class on which the State has relied to kill and to die for it. Women fought back in the wake of the seventies sexual revolution - often bitterly. They too have calmed as a credit fuelled consumer culture enabled women to express themselves independently. The phenomenon of 'sex-positive feminism' has eliminated the madonna-whore stereotype quite effectively over the last fifteen years or so. In most of the West, certainly in its prosperous areas, this shared calming of gender conflict, free of the pressures of religion and war, has resulted in a wry understanding, far from perfect, that seems to improve with each passing year. But has it and will it continue to do so? Is the 'normal' man basically a sex-crazed thug as these pulps and many feminists of the 1970s might imply?

The last two cycles (the 1930s and 1970s) both started in eras of economic disruption.

The first cycle damaged the sexual balance in favour of an unnatural and essential formalisation of roles leaving behind the wreckage of enraged men and frustrated women. The struggle for resources in this era (and the Church cannot take the blame for what happened elsewhere) resulted in a conventionalisation of domestic life for the sake of a fixed vision of society in many places. This happened in Nazi Germany, in Soviet Russia, in increasingly imperial America (albeit with more chance of a strike out for freedom by a determined individual) - less so in the UK.

The second cycle created its own sense of disorder for working class lives but the essential demand for freedom was too strong, creating profound pain between generations. This second thirty year cycle has seen economic and social-sexual freedom move so fast so that the world we see today would be unrecognisable to the second world war soldier. We see a global porn industry accessible to anyone, a celebrity culture epitomised by Paris Hilton, an egalitarian legal structure for men and women, an aversion to conscripted war (despite the recent dabblings of the liberal internationalists) and the widespread commercialisation of sexuality as a marketing tool for goods and services.

What will the next thirty year cycle bring? These pulp covers, other books such as Freeman's and the growing body of evidence that suggests that the brain is malleable to an amazing degree suggests that how we are in our relations to the other sex is always a fine calibration between our limbic reality and the demands made by social, political and economic forces beyond our control. Faced with disorder, authorities seek to constrain sexual modes by force of habit - even if, as in Russia, the implicit game is the promotion of sexuality to breed more Russians!

But it is hard to see how, even with the probable increase in small wars and insurgencies and radical claims from faith-based and new ideological groups, we can go back easily to the industrialised society's conventionalisation of sexual relations - the social conditions and lack of access to free information are not there. States and societies can no longer control minds in quite the way they could in the West - and less so in the emerging world. The internet ensures that the management of complexity is now at a premium rather than the futile attempt to simplify human complexity to some simple ideological set of propositions. There are no longer 'norms'. Essentialism is absurd because it just does not work.

But we should never underestimate the pressure on freedom from those attempting to create order out of the growing chaos of recession, possibly depression, in the next cycle. There are already strange sexual puritanisms, associated with traditionalism, emerging in the public discourse of rising new powers like China and India. Faith-based groups may have failed to capture the global agenda in the Bush era and have withdrawn from the heart of power but their agenda has partly been lodged in the minds of sections of the elite in a spurious link between freedom and disorder.

Illiberal groups, often claiming to be progressive, continue to attempt to manage sexual politics from behind closed doors, with their own brands of spurious research, to try to bring the extreme liberalism of recent years to heel. And, of course, God knows what service in Iraq and Afghanistan is doing to tens of thousands of young men who will return, once again, to countries that now know what they do and despise them for it.

This book is recommended as raw material - women will find it downright disturbing or laughably absurd. But they should not believe that these pulps represent what men are - any more than the slutty Cosmo Girl launched in 2003 represented what young teenage women were - but only what some men were obliged to become by the convention, repression and manipulation of their 'betters'. Resistance to this sort of thing is never futile, it is continual and necessary - and is always a joint project for both men and women.